

Short literature notices

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Published online: 27 March 2009
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Dawson, A. and Verweij, M. (eds.): 2007, *Ethics, Prevention and Public Health*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2007, Price £35, 256 pp., ISBN-13: 978-0-19-929069-7

The book comprises twelve original articles tackling ethical issues raised in the field of public health. Public health ethics is a rapidly developing area within and outside bioethics and this book attempts to fill some gaps in the literature. The chapters have emerged from discussions in bioethics conferences and other events organized by the International Association of Bioethics, the International Public Health Ethics Network, and a seminar on public health and ethical theory held in the Netherlands. The contributions cover a wide range of topics, raise puzzling questions and use theoretical tools from various disciplines to argue their cases.

An early chapter by the editors explores the various definitions of public health and draws attention to the double notion of “public” within the term, meaning either the health of the public or the collective interventions aiming at population health. The authors successfully show that this analysis and more clarity about the term of public health would facilitate distinguishing it from medicine, and therefore, public health ethics from medical ethics. Many of the chapters emphasize the need for such distinctions: several of the moral questions explored in the book point to the insufficiency of employing celebrated medical ethics principles (such as that of autonomy) as the only means of ethical analysis. Instead a combination of various moral theories, philosophical approaches and historical analysis is

used to navigate the reader through the conflict between the individual and collective health burdens and benefits as it is illustrated in the chapters by Sorell on the concerns over the MMR vaccine, by van den Hoven on the obligations of individuals to contribute to the protection of others, by Verweij on tobacco discouragement, by Dawson on herd protection as a public good and by Nijsingh on informed consent for newborn screening. Jacobson et al. show how similar infectious diseases have received different policy responses shaped in (and by) different sociopolitical climates but still marking a major inconsistency in how infectious diseases are dealt with.

It is notable that the book includes the chapter by Wikler and Brock on population-level bioethics, which shifts the attention to global issues and particularly to issues pertinent to the least healthy populations in the developing world. The chapter also sketches a research agenda of many ethical questions arising in that context which deem ethical analysis. The relationship between public health, ethics and health law are explored by Gostin and Stone. They argue for a new focus on the societal welfare in the context of a new public health ethics and propose the use of law for health advocacy and health promotion through certain specific conditions. The remaining chapters cover important topics such as the controversy surrounding quantitative methods as a policy tool in a health priority setting (by Brock), as well as a chapter on civic republicanism by Jennings and how the notion of health citizenship can serve as a framework for public health policy.

Even this brief listing of the chapters and their authors shows the diversity of the issues raised and the multi-disciplinary approaches necessary to explore the many ethical conundrums in public health. These features underscore a

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main theme of the book namely, the need to advance the debate about public health ethics within new theoretical frameworks.

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Maio, G., Clausen, J., and Müller, O. (eds): 2008, *Mensch ohne Maß? Reichweite und Grenzen anthropologischer Argumente in der biomedizinischen Ethik*. Freiburg: Alber, 436 pp., Price: € 48.00, ISBN: 978-3495482735

The debate about “human enhancement”—the use of medical means “beyond therapy”—is currently a flourishing field in biomedical ethics. Most discussions of such possible medical or biotechnological interventions focus on the risk-benefit-ratio, on questions of distributive justice or on the autonomy of subjects undergoing these interventions. But another, anthropological question often stands in the background: do these interventions in human organisms constitute a threat to “human nature” and do they alter what “being human” really means?

Mensch ohne Maß? attempts to evaluate these “anthropological arguments” which assess the moral legitimacy of technically modifying human organisms beyond therapy. Is it possible to formulate an ethically meaningful understanding of “being human” or of “human nature” which is based neither exclusively on scientific facts nor on a religious world view? This collection of German papers from different disciplines combines both conceptual discussions and concrete applications.

The first part of the collection carefully observes the idea of a “human nature” and its function in ethical argumentation. The authors avoid the kind of ideological argumentation which frequently comes along with talk of human nature; they illustrate the many facets of the term, provide a systematic differentiation of distinguishable aspects and are fully aware of the pitfalls which result from any simple understanding of “nature” or “normalcy”. Nevertheless, the authors admit the relevance of a shared common understanding of what it means to be a human being and search for ways to clarify this function.

The first three articles are particularly convincing. Opening the field, Oliver Müller develops a self-reflective conception of human nature, understood as the *relation* humans can develop towards their own biological nature (not as these biological facts themselves) and attributes an “indirect normative function” to it. Dieter Birnbacher gives a thorough analysis of how to conceptualise “human nature” and how this can possibly provide ethical guidance—as norm, as moral value, and as a foundation for

non-moral values. Geert Keil discusses the relation between naturalistic positions in anthropology and ethics (a well chosen reprint from 2005).

The second half of the book attempts to show how far a given understanding of “human nature” can provide orientation in concrete bioethical dilemmas (neuro-enhancement, doping, assisted reproduction, nanotechnologies, and anti-aging medicine). Here, the level of theoretical reflection is not always as high as it is in the first half, but the concrete examples provide very stimulating material for further reflection. Outstanding is Claudia Pawlenka’s discussion of doping in sports. In comparing and contrasting the domain of sports with the broader “anthropological sphere” she shows the relevance of the idea of naturalness.

Altogether the book thoroughly presents ongoing debates about anthropological arguments in biomedical ethics. Furthermore, it is rich in concrete applications, thus engaging in dialogue between theory and practice. Nevertheless, the existing gap between theoretical deliberation and practical application is not bridged in all papers. But this, of course, is a general problem of bioethics. *Mensch ohne Maß?* offers a highly informative and inspiring read about an urgent question.

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Rollin, B. E. (ed): *Science and Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 292 pp., Price: € 62.99, ISBN 978-0521857543

In this book, Bernard E. Rollin analyses the ideology that denies the relevance of ethics to science. The book covers areas such as scientific ideology, the notion of ethics, research on human beings, animal research, biotechnology research, and pain research. His main discussion concerns what he calls the “scientific ideology”, i.e., that science is value-free (according to positivistic ideals) and even that there is no place for ethical issues in science. He claims that the scientific ideology is still strong within science (at least in the United States) even though scientists have become aware of ethical issues. Another main argument is that if there is no self-regulating mechanism within science that avoids unethical research, then society will stipulate the boundaries for science through legislation.

This book fits well in undergraduate courses in research ethics or as a complement in courses in philosophy of science. Rollin’s way of writing, combining deeper philosophical thoughts with anecdotes from his own life helps in suggesting relevant discussion topics for students. In particular it offers good arguments about the importance of

teaching ethics, and also gives a good insight into the changes that have occurred within research ethics in the United States since the 1950s.

For philosophers who are well acquainted with bioethical debates this book serves more as a source of examples than to bring the philosophical arguments further. The reason is that Rollin focuses more on the need for ethics in general rather than on what kind of ethics is needed. Many of the ideas here presented could be found elsewhere in Bernard Rollin's rich production, but they are here quite well compiled and presented. Therefore, the book may also serve as a good introduction to Bernard Rollin's philosophy.

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Lars Østnor (ed.): *Stem Cells, Human Embryos and Ethics. Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Berlin, Springer, 2008 255 pp., Price: € 29.95, ISBN: 978-1-4020-6988-8

The discovery first of the existence and then of the potential uses of human stem cells is revolutionizing medicine. However, in Europe quite a few books have addressed the ethical problems surrounding this issue from an interdisciplinary perspective. Stem cell research and therapy, and in particular the use of human embryonic stem cells, are raising burning ethical questions. On the one hand, due to the destruction of human embryos that it requires, this practice is very controversial. On the other hand, regarding the potential therapeutic uses that may result from it, it could be really promising.

What are the ethical challenges posed by the use of human stem cells? The book editor, Lars Østnor (University of Oslo), summarizes them in the following question: "What is the moral status of human embryos with regard to the use of embryonic stem cells for scientific research and clinical therapy, and what are the weaknesses and strengths of various views when they are critically evaluated?" This book, which is the result of a two year research project supported by the Norwegian Research Council, tries to

answer this question through an interdisciplinary perspective which includes biology, medicine, law, philosophy, theology, at the level of research as well as at the level of therapy.

The volume is structured in four sections. The first one, which tackles the biological and medical perspectives, specifies the sources and potential clinical applications of stem cells. It also addresses the potential promises of neural stem cells for neural repair after injury or disease of the brain or spinal cord. The second section deals with the social and political perspectives on the topic. One of the chapters, by LeRoy Walter, explores the intercultural implications of human embryonic stem cell research. Other chapters offer a special consideration of moral empathy regarding this issue, and try to identify the specificity of a European research approach to this topic.

The third section is more philosophical than the previous ones, and focuses on the discussion about the status of the human embryo, in particular the potentiality argument. One of the contributions, by Ludger Honnefelder, describes the way in which this discussion took place in Germany. Another one, by Otfried Höffe, addresses the question of human cloning in the context of the stem cell debate.

The fourth and last part concludes with three articles supporting, respectively, theological, critical, and ethical perspectives regarding the use of human stem cells. The content of each contribution is very variable. In the last part, for example, Lars Østnor presents a survey carried out in Christian Churches, which points out very finely the similarities and the differences from one Church to the other, while Gunnar Heiene focuses on the contribution of theologians, and Monika Bobbert offers a very original reflection stressing that the moral status of the human embryo is not the only relevant one. According to her, this question must be integrated into a more general context, including parent's property rights on embryos, women's well-being and certain changes of context. In sum, a book which makes one think!

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